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ARCHEOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY.¹

Indian Corn in Italy.—Some Italian Naturalists like Bonafous (*Hist. Nat. Agric. et Economique du Mais*, Paris and Turin, 1836) have supposed that Indian Corn (*Zea Mays*) had grown in Asia or Africa before the Spaniards found it in America, but De Candolle (*L'Origine delle piante Coltivate*, Milan 1883, p. 519) believes that it came into the Old World from the New after the discovery by Columbus, and that Rifaud, who in 1819 found maize in an Egyptian tomb at Thebes, was deceived by an Arab.

Signor Goiran, of Verona, supposes that the plant was first largely cultivated near Verona about 1647, and Signor Anelli, the inventor of "Anellis maize-bread," informs me that it was not used for human food in the Milanese until about 1817. Harschberger in his recent important investigation of the history of the grain (*Zea Mays—A Botanical Study*, Philadelphia, 1892) while tracing the source of the American grain to Southern Mexico does not believe in its extra American origin, but whether we may suppose it to have grown in any corner of the Old World before 1492 or not, there is no question that the Spanish discoverers brought specimens of it from America to where it was noticed in cultivation near Seville about 1527. How it got into Italy from Spain, (granted that it came thence) whether directly, or by the round-about way of Arab commerce through Morocco, Africa and the Levant, no one seems to have informed us, though if by the latter route, we may guess that it found its way into Lombardy through Venice.

However and whenever it appeared on the Lombard plain, the well preserved architectural decorations, frescoes, paintings and book illuminations of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Italy might throw an unexpected light upon the date and direction of its first importation. The frescoes of Mantegna (1451–1517) often adorned with borders of plants and flowers might reveal maize. There is no maize, I am informed, among the plants and fruits painted on the leaf margins of the magnificent 15th century Missal known as the *Breviario Grimani* by Hans Memling (died before 1499) at the library in Venice; and I failed to find signs of the use of Indian Corn in the farmyard pictures of Jacopo Bassano (1510–1592) at Venice and Verona, or in the throng of stooping figures and animals by him known as "The Fair" at Bassano, where

¹ This department is edited by H. C. Mercer, University of Pennsylvania.

the turkey appears then as new and as American as maize. I found it, however, abundantly used in the Stucco ceiling decorations (by Vittorio, middle of 16th century) of the Villa Masser near Castel Franco.

If there remains any doubt as to the genuine antiquity of the grains in Rifaud's Egyptian tomb no better evidence for or against the American origin of the plant now grown in Europe could be looked for than what these unransacked pictures and ornaments may offer, where at slight pains and by a turn of the head, any traveller will settle the question beyond all dispute if he discovers maize in color or stone before 1492.

While common parlance in the Old World has so often held to a geographical name for the strange grain, dubbing it in Lorraine "Roman grain," in Tuscany "Sicilian grain," in Sicily "grain of India," in the Pyrenees "Spanish grain," in Provence "Barbary or Guinea grain," in Turkey "Egyptian grain," and in Egypt "Syrian grain," these Folk names have seemed by implication to deny, in every case, an American origin to the plant. But the fact in De Candolle's opinion proves no more than that the English name "Turkey" has appeared to deny an American parentage to the familiar *Meleagris gallopavo*.

According to Professor Keller of the University of Padua, the human consumption of maize ceases south of Bologna, and in my conversations with townspeople a slight notion of something ridiculous seemed to attach to the grain, as of a food fit for hogs and cows, rather than men. Notwithstanding this, some of the peasants eat maize in the common form of Polenta (boiled mush) to such an extent in the Novarese, Bergamasco, Milanese, Comasco, Bresciano, and Tremonese, and in Mantua, Veneto and Vercelli² that a sickness called Pelagra, showing itself in shrunken skin, emaciation, dizziness, intense thirst, and a desire to plunge into pools of water, is the result.

Leaving out the alcohols, oils, colors and glucose extracted from Italian maize in recent years, the most considerable and important of all the human uses of the grain in Italy is

(1) *Polenta*, the universally mill ground meal boiled with salt and water for half an hour, large doughy loaves of which, saffron yellow or white, can be found in almost any peasant's cupboard from Venice to Piedmont.

Sometimes cut slices of it are found, as I saw them at Venice, fried, like American fried mush.

²For this and the following information as to Anellis Bread and Pane Mistura I am indebted to the Rev. Signor Anelli of Monza.

Now and then a little maize meal goes with farina, salt and water into a soup and you have

(2) *Polentina di Cittadella*. The further uses of maize in northern Italy for human food are as follows:

(3) *Pane Giallo*, of Milan, a baked loaf made half of maize and half of wheat meal.

(4) *Pane Mistura*, of Milan and the Veronese, a baked loaf of varied shape made of one-third maize and two-thirds wheat meal.

(5) *Pane Mistura Con Uva* which is No. (4) mixed with rasins.

(6) *Focaccia*, (Fogassa, Verona city dialect; Pissotta or Pinze, Country, Veronese dialect). As I saw it made in a peasant's kitchen near Verona, it is produced as follows: Take one pint of yellow maize meal, mix it with two pints of wheat flour. Pour upon the mixture half a teacupful of melted butter; add then two tablespoonfuls of white sugar and one tablespoonful of soda; this done, pour on gradually about a half a pint of hot water and roll and knead the mass well. Finally having made the dough into a round ball, flatten it into a cake about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch thick and 10 inches in diameter, both sides of which are to be well stippled with the point of a knife. Fry it then in a pan greased with about a half a teacupful of butter and raised about two inches over a pile of live but flameless embers.

(7) *Cinquantino* (Zinquantin, dialect Veronese) as eaten near Padua and Verona. This is the young, milky ear of the white variety of maize roasted near the embers.

(8) *Melica Dolce*. A small sugared cake made of maize meal in Milan.

(9) *Pane d'Anelli*, eaten in the Milanese. A mixed bread baked of two-thirds maize and one-third wheat, recently invented by the Rev. Signor Anelli, of Monza, as a cheap substitute for *Pane Mistura*, and as a cure for Pelagra in districts where peasants who eat maize four or five times a day suffer from the disease.

The two well known and commonly used varieties of maize in northern Italy are the bianco (white) producing a white meal but considered of inferior flavor as polenta, and the rosso (red) with a very brilliant reddish-yellow tinge on the cob, and producing a golden yellow meal.

By the tenth of September the russet fields of the ripening grain are as characteristic of the Lombard plain, as the horizon obstructing locust hedges, or the pollard trees festooned with grape vines. But the ears ripen on clipped stalks and we miss the wigwam shaped stacks of American "fodder." I saw peasants threshing maize with flails near Verona, but could hear nothing of pounding the grain with pestle and

mortar. Hominy large or small and "ash" and "hoe" cakes seemed unknown, and the interesting Mexican edible products of maize like "tortillas," (wafer like cakes of baked maize dough,) or the peppered dumplings called "tomales" had no more place in the Lombard kitchen than the transatlantic art of crushing on metates the water soaked and softened grains. Near Castel Franco, I saw a large bunch of red ears hanging by their twisted husks on the wall of a roadside shrine.

An etymology has been suggested for the name Grano Turco, in the antics of boys when bearded and moustached with maize silk, they mimic the fierce looks of Turks in the high "corn." We cannot think that the Italian lad does not smoke the mock tobacco that must tempt him upon each ear. If he does he apes a habit no less American in its origin than the maize itself. So the American lad playing with a "shoe string bow" on a "corn-stalk fiddle" would turn to Italy for his inspiration.—H. C. MERCER.